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Newsletter

www.cheshire-gardens-trust.org.uk

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Some future events:

- ✿ Urban Landscapes – spaces and places in Manchester City Centre – Sunday 21 February
- ✿ Swedish Gardens – the story of a green country, of garden lovers and a British heritage – Saturday 12 March
- ✿ AGM at Tabley Hall – Thursday, 14 April



It is a few years since we last visited Grappenhall Heys Walled Garden and that was before the range of Victorian glasshouses had been restored. Whilst the rest of the garden was attractive and well cared for, the prominent derelict glasshouses could only detract.

So it was great news to hear that the garden's owner, Grappenhall and Thelwall Parish Council, had been successful in their bid for a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund to restore them. The restoration of the glasshouses was completed earlier this year, so we thought another visit was

warranted and members obviously agreed since the visit was fully booked.

The visit was in three parts.

First there was an introductory tour by the head gardener Graham Richardson and the Community Outreach Officer Lynn Podmore, giving us a brief history of the garden.

Then we went into the glasshouses meeting/display space for a talk on their restoration by conservation architect Adrian Pearson from Lloyd Evans Prichard.

After a break for tea and lots of delicious cake, we then had an apple tasting. It was a busy and very engaging visit.

Part 1: the Introduction

I should confess an interest in the garden. I first worked there in 1998 when the gardens were very much under restoration.

Some of the hard landscape such as the walls had been repaired, but there was little left of the historic planting, because much of the garden had been overgrown for decades.

My role was to manage the garden for the Commission for the New Towns (CNT) and re-plant it using a maintenance contract and landscape contractor over a number of years.

There was no central path and the Yew hedge dividing the pleasure and kitchen gardens, was a row of overgrown trees.

There were a couple of nervous years, when we had completely removed the Yew canopies but they had not started to re-grow into the hedge you now see!

I was also involved in calculating the endowment which CNT gave the new owner, when they transferred the garden to the Parish Council. This funds the post of head gardener and I remained on-board until Graham was recruited and settled in. During this time we set up the Friends group, trained volunteers, carried out historic research and created the original website and leaflets.

Lynn told us that the Warrington banker Thomas Parr had created the 150 acre estate from farmland in the 1830s. The site of his neo-Classical house is marked out in what is now woodland, just north of the garden. The house remained the home of the Parrs until the 1930s when they moved to Herefordshire.

WRENs were stationed in the house during WWII, and after that it was offices and a

furniture store which caught fire.

The Parrs left the walled garden to their gamekeeper and his sister, Philip and Edith Power, who kept poultry in it. Eventually the estate was bought by Warrington New Town. Much of the estate landscape remains and now forms the public open space which surrounds and is enjoyed by the residents in the recent housing developments.

The walled garden is unusual because the wall surrounds the pleasure grounds as well as the kitchen garden.

The pleasure grounds were designed around the three ponds (old clay/marl pits), and in the Parr's day, the path followed the walls, forming a circuit around the garden. This would have given a completely different perspective from the new central path (*see photo, front page*) and may be reinstated in the future.

The holly walk (*below*) is the only section of the circuit that remains.



The walk around the pleasure grounds then led to the front of the glasshouses in the kitchen garden; this 'master's walk' was screened from the productive part of the garden by tall, floriferous borders.

The garden is now maintained by Graham and a team of volunteers. The Friends have been a very important contributor to the success of the garden, with their physical work, events, fund-raising and research.

For more history and details of the events at the garden, see www.ghwalledgarden.org.uk.

Part 2: Architectural Challenges of the Glasshouse Restoration

The second part of our visit to Grappenhall Heys Walled Garden was a talk in the newly-restored

Victorian glasshouses by conservation architect Adrian Pearson, director at Lloyd Evans Prichard (LEP).

The glasshouses were made by Foster and Pearson Ltd, one of two pre-eminent Victorian makers, the others being Messenger & Co. Ltd. They were erected in the 1830s and extended thereafter to add new facilities.

Adrian spoke about the challenges of restoration. Not least of these was convincing the Heritage Lottery Fund that the glasshouses warranted restoration, because they were not Listed. However after much research and study (including a Historic Landscape Survey, Conservation Plan, Heritage Impact Assessment and Stage D report which justified the design), a successful bid was produced with the Parish Council and the Friends.

The guiding principle was that the restoration should be 'conservation-led' and therefore retain as much as possible of the remaining fabric. Adrian felt this had been achieved estimating that 70% is conserved materials and 30% new. He took us through the various aspects of the design.

Foundations, plinth and walls

Originally there were no foundations and the sandstone plinth was badly damaged, so new concrete foundations and a St Bee's sandstone plinth were necessary.

Many of the remaining 1920s bricks from the sill wall were re-used and lime mortar was used throughout. The floors were very variable in height and had obviously been modified, so these were replaced, but the sandstone edgings and channels were re-used where possible.

Timber

The timber was beyond repair, but Foster and Pearson catalogues are still available. Using these, together with careful site survey, LEP were able to replicate the design.

The original timber was a close-grained softwood, and the winning contractor, Lambert Walker, had to provide a sample as close to the original grain as possible; about 25 growth rings to the inch. Adrian showed us sections of both.

Paint

The original paint was highly toxic, and so can no longer be used, but hence it preserved the timber well. Linseed oil was therefore sourced



Above: Before and Below: After restoration



from Scandinavia via an estate in Norfolk. It is breathable and long-lasting, but takes a long time to dry. So the timber had to be painted in the workshop before it was brought to site. After 5 years, the timber will require a wipe down with warm oil. LEP have successfully trialled this for 10 years in challenging conditions on Anglesey!

Glass and blinds

The original horticultural glass would have been soft and only 3-4mm thick; it could not be toughened and would not therefore have been suitable for a modern public building.

The restored glasshouses at Tatton have used modern Polish glass to recreate the texture of 18th century glass, but since the latest version at Grappenhall was 1920s plate glass, it was decided to use modern, over-toughened glass to give texture, with a film on the inside for solar control. On the roofs, double-lengths with beaver tails have been used. The blinds are newly made in Hampshire, but are copies of those that remained.

Ironwork

80% of the original ironwork remained and it has been restored by Lost Art in Wigan.

This included roof vents, window openers and floor grills. One trademark Foster and Pearson latch remained and this has been copied for the other doors (*see next page*).



Above: The Trademark Foster & Pearson latch



Above: Before and Below: After restoration



The glasshouses are now pleasant spaces to be in and give the garden a range of functions, just as they were designed to do originally.

However some of these are now modern functions to meet contemporary needs. The smallest, western house has been retained as a display house (*right*) and looked delightful, full of well-tended, colourful plants, with restored artefacts on display, a brass pump and timber sprayer.

The central part of the range (*below left*) is a tiled flexible space, with café tables and chairs, and a meeting/lecture/display area, just as we used it on the day of our visit. The eastern end of the range has a section for training vines and – for the volunteers, schools and other groups – a working area which has staging for potting, growing on seedlings etc.

I have already confessed my earlier involvement at Grappenhall. But even without this, I would have found the restored glasshouses beautiful; elegant and enjoyable spaces to be in, *and* useful. They are simply uplifting.

Congratulations to all involved for their concerted hard work in achieving this. Long may Grappenhall Heys continue to use and enjoy its glasshouses.



Above: Before and Below: After restoration



Part 3: Apple tasting

The third and final part of our visit to Grappenhall Heys Walled Garden was an apple tasting with an introduction by the head gardener Graham Richardson.

Graham told us that no historic apple trees remain in the garden, though during restoration a metal label was found for 'Charles Ross' (introduced around 1890). So the garden has young standard trees; 21 varieties, 17 eaters and 4 cookers, although some can be used for both.

The varieties chosen had to be suitably historic and ones that should do well in the North. Graham said for example, that Cox's Orange Pippin does not do well, but Bramley, Arthur Turner and Lord Derby all do. As many of us know this can be a challenge! Having given it 10 years, I have recently removed an unsuccessful Cox.

Grappenhall Heys holds an Apple Day each year. Obviously it can be a challenge to set the date in advance because it is so dependent on the season. How much fruit will there be, on what varieties and will it be ripe?

Not surprisingly on 3 October 2015 there was a good range of varieties ripe, not just good quantities. People pick and buy the fruit on the day and a few weeks subsequently.

Once all the trees are harvested, Graham decides whether there is enough to juice and if so it is sent to Alan Hewitt at Dunham Massey. It returns attractively 'branded' which makes an excellent gift, as many of our members decided.

[Juicing was also available at Eddisbury Fruit Farm again this year, see

<http://www.olliesorchard.co.uk/>].

Graham and Lynn Podmore, the Community



Outreach Officer, had set out a very attractive array of fruit, labels, plates and knives on the tables outside the glasshouses. We tucked in and soon lively discussions were underway about the merits of the various apples. It was amazing how different they all tasted! We also realised you only have that experience when there is such a range to try – it was a real treat.

From my straw poll, the favourite was 'Margil', which was both sharp and sweet. It is a mid-winter dessert apple thought to be from the 1670s, and was grown by Sir William Temple in his garden at Sheen. As I often find myself thinking, our predecessors often knew well what they were about.

My other notes say 'Court Pendu Plat – very sharp', 'Adam's Pearmain – OK', Duke of Devonshire – NO! We had a debate about whether the latter was really named as an honour or an insult.

Of course everyone will have different thoughts and I'm sorry I didn't get more of them recorded. Perhaps we need another visit, just for apple tasting?

For inspiring, beautiful apple-related information, lists of varieties by county etc, see <http://commonground.org.uk/projects/orchards/>.

Maria Luczak

My primroses have been in flower for weeks and my day lilies think summer is almost here. No doubt your own garden is equally confused. This is nothing new. I discovered this item in a Liverpool newspaper dated 1 January 1829:

MILDNESS OF THE SEASON: - We understand that there is now to be seen in full flower, in the open air, in the Walton Nursery, a beautiful climbing plant, (*Eccremocarpus Scaber*) whose spikes of brilliant orange flowers surpass any thing we have seen at this season. We are informed that it has been in full flower since the month of May last. There is also in the green-house a large plant of the *Bignonia Capensis*, with very large spikes of scarlet orange flowers, of equal brilliancy and greater splendour. We understand that this hardy shrub has been in flower since the month of July.

This comment on hardiness was a mistake: Bignonia capensis (Cape Honeysuckle, now known as Tecoma capensis can only be grown outside in the summer.

Garden shows and festivals: an international perspective

What has Europe ever done for us?

One answer is classical architecture – the inspiration for the late Sebastian de Ferranti's fine Henbury Hall. Ed Bennis' participation in "Hybrid Parks" (an EU funded collaboration) and in particular his research into Garden Shows and Festivals is another.

These came together on 7 November 2015 at Ed's characteristically four star lecture "opening a whole new world".

The project's objective was for garden owners to understand the range of garden festivals and shows and how they could encourage new visitors to their gardens. With origins in 17th century "florists' societies", horticultural shows blossomed in the 19th century. Philadelphia Flower Show in 1829 was an early one, predating RHS initial efforts in 1833.

Now found on every continent, garden shows have become important money spinners. A 2005 estimate calculated a gardening contribution of £4bn to the UK economy. "Selling stuff" is usually the priority. Typically, 75% of visitors are female, aged 55 to 60 from socio-economic groups ABC1, with few children or ethnic minorities.

Ed explained the differences between city-centre, suburban and rural locations and between indoor and outdoor settings. Indoors is "great for lighting".

One of his favourites – **Philadelphia Flower Show** – is entirely indoors. Its huge 10 acres of space accommodates 250,000 visitors during February / March. Wow factors include 30 foot high floral interpretations of Alexander Calder sculptures and performances by trapeze artists. Amongst the exhibits are interpretations of other gardens – Getty Centre in faraway California was one.

Innovative attractions such as miniature gardens, likened by Ed to Amsterdam peepshows, were a great success. Unmissable side events ranged from "garden teas" for the elderly and genteel through to "girls night out". One hundred and eighty sales kiosks did a roaring trade in "gardening junk". Corporate sponsorship and earnings generated profits that are reinvested in city tree planting, growing food

in deprived areas and other initiatives. Economic impact is estimated at \$61million.



Above and below: the Philadelphia show is vibrant and unusual



Ed's air and road trip explored a wide range of shows, each of them different. Our own dear **Arley Garden Festival** with its 6,000-7,000 visitors offers the unique selling point of personal tours by Lord Ashcroft – a big draw.

Nantes International Floralties “sort of kitsch” takes place over ten days every five years: 500,000 visitors are attracted to its agricultural show indoor venue.

Zurich Giardina (indoors) is a very upmarket showcase for designers and contractors: 60,000 almost exclusively Swiss visitors in five days mid-March enjoy a themed approach – “live in your garden” being suitably vague.



Outdoor dining in style à la Suisse

Keukenhof promotes Dutch floriculture and horticulture on a massive scale: 800,000 visitors have their eyes “blasted with colour” (see below). They are moved around the site with Disney quality crowd management.



Refreshingly simple **Nordpark Düsseldorf** is basically a one day plant fair, selling and swapping.

Schloss Dyke Gartenlust is a thrice-annual 3-day event for visitors to the estate with the interest of a show garden under construction, attracting some 15,000 – including Cheshire Gardens Trust in 2011.

Chaumont Festival International des Jardins is a striking exception to the commercial character of these garden shows. Open from April through

to October, its Loire Chateau setting and carefully designed spaces are calculated to accommodate concept-led gardens. Intelligent and philosophical, enlivened by commissioned installations such as digital art, Chaumont is dependent on public sector subsidy the French way.



The beautiful setting for the Chaumont Festival

RHS Chelsea, Hampton Court and Tatton were subjected to critical comment that was no surprise to Cheshire Gardens Trust members. Still, Ed reminded us that there was always the possibility of celebs to be spotted.

Alongside Philly and Chaumont, Ed’s third favourite – when pressed – was the estimable city-centre **Manchester Dig the City** (see below). This seven day summer fiesta involves many community organisations and attracts children and young people to the city-centre displays and entertainments.



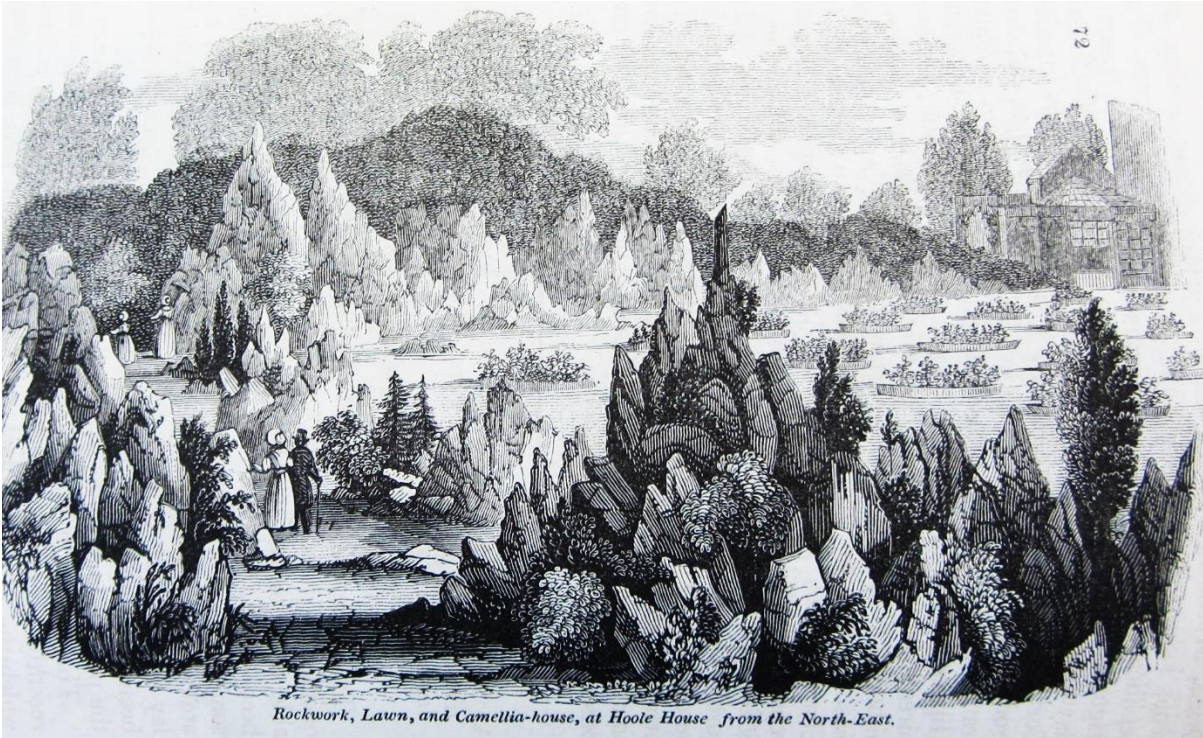
We are all invited to Ed’s talk in St. Petersburg in June 2016. Alternatively, we can ponder Gerard Manly Hopkins: “and for all this nature is never spent”.

Walter Menzies

You can read about the Hybrid Parks project at www.hybridparks.eu; the final report is at www.hybridparks.eu/wp-content/uploads/HYB-2014-02-Final-Report-L7-neu.pdf and Ed’s report on Shows and Festivals is at www.hybridparks.eu/wp-content/uploads/1-Garden-show-main-report.pdf.

R is for Rockery or Rock Garden

“A heaped arrangement of rough stones with soil between them, planted with rock plants, especially alpiners.” (OED)



Rockwork, Lawn, and Camellia-house, at Hoole House from the North-East.

In 1838 Cheshire’s most famous garden was the “flower garden and rock fence” created by Lady Broughton at Hoole House near Chester.¹ Both house and garden have disappeared² but we have John Claudius Loudon’s account and the above engraving published in his *Gardener’s Magazine*.³

This scenic rockery surrounded the flower garden on three sides and was built with Welsh grey limestone. The snowy peaks and a glacier were dressed with quartz, spar and white marble chips; the highest peak stood 32 ft. high.

The lower slopes were “*so generally covered with creeping and alpine plants, that it all mingles together in one mass*”. Loudon mentions many flowering and evergreen shrubs and trees, and lists 71 genera of alpiners and rock-loving plants with full Latin names. He also passes on advice on planting: “*the most rare and beautiful alpiners*” are “*each placed in a nidus of suitable soil and the surface protected from the weather by broken fragments of stone, clean-washed river gravel, the debris of decaying rocks, moss and other substances*”. Dark mulching was used to retain moisture and increase heat, while white pebbles kept the ground cool.

Loudon’s description and pictures suggest that Lady Eliza Broughton must rank among Cheshire’s most accomplished horticulturists.

Although much overgrown, her garden appears to have survived until 1954, when it was demolished to make way for 38 houses. Hoole House was demolished in 1972.



Lady Broughton⁴ (1771-1857) was born Elizabeth Egerton of Oulton, she married Sir John Delves Broughton of Doddington Hall in 1791. As a British Army officer he spent most of his life abroad.

The couple had no children and separated in 1814, when Sir John secured £3000 p.a. for the separate maintenance of his wife.⁵ Lady Eliza Broughton leased Hoole House and commissioned Chester’s architect Thomas Harrison to build a veranda and conservatory to the house, and camellia and geranium houses in the garden. She lived at Hoole House until her death.

A much more recent rock garden is that at Alderley House in Alderley Park.

Alderley House is a 1960s office building designed by Harry S. Fairhurst and Sons for ICI. It has been unoccupied for some years. The rear wings of the building frame a courtyard open to the south dominated by a multi stemmed cedar tree (*right*) and containing a Japanese style rock garden.

From the entrance to the courtyard a path leads past the cedar to the rock garden which is circular in form with large slabs of greenish slate set on edge in a radial pattern amid cobbles and smaller stones.

A path of slate slabs leads into the north east corner of the courtyard. The associated planting includes small pines, multi stemmed *Betula jacquemontii*, maples, ferns, grasses, and ground cover plants.

It has been suggested by Ian Urquart of Matthews Landscaping⁶ that the rock garden is not contemporaneous with the building but was created in the 1980s or later.

Whatever the date, the rock garden contains a clearly discernible design with Japanese influences created of high quality stones and with attractive mature plant material.

Alderley House is due for demolition under proposals for redevelopment by Manchester Science Partnerships⁷ so this courtyard is likely to suffer the same fate as the Hoole rockery.

Hoole - **Barbara Wright**,
Alderley Park - **Barbara Moth and Jacquie Williams**

Notes:

¹ For a detailed account, see: "The Lost Gardens of Hoole", a publication by Chester Society for Landscape History, 2008.

² Hoole House was at the corner of Hoole Road and Piper's Lane, near the A56/A41 roundabout.

³ Loudon, John Claudius. 1838 *Gardener's Magazine* Vol. 14, p. 353-63.



Courtyard with cedar tree and rock garden to rear



Detail of rock garden

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Broughton_baronets:

"Portrait of Elizabeth, wife of Sir John Delves Broughton" by Henry Braeburn (Museum of Fine Arts, Houston).

⁵ Cheshire Archives and Local Studies: DDB/F/17. £3,000 in 1810 = £101,880 in 2005.

⁶ Ian Urquart is the son in law of Fred Matthews, nurseryman and plantsman whose firm S.E. Matthews was responsible for much of the landscaping at Alderley Park during ICI's tenancy, working and based in the park from the 1950s till 2005. Their landscape maintenance of the park ceased in 2009.

⁷ In March 2014, following Astra Zeneca's decision to move their research and development division to Cambridgeshire, Alderley Park was bought by Manchester Science Parks (MSP). MSP is a public private partnership between Manchester's main academic centres and local councils and Bruntwood.

Lady Broughton was a Caldwell customer, buying her vegetable seeds and tools from the Knutsford nursery. In October 1833 she purchased 13 different types of herbaceous perennial including this beautiful *Commelina erecta* and a brand new variety of *Phlox*. Unfortunately we can't be sure about all the plants as many of the names recorded are still unresolved – like *Pulmonaria daurica* and *Potentilla formosa*.



Abney Hall, Cheadle



Sir James Watts, the greatest of Manchester's 19th century textile magnates, moved to Cheadle in 1849 when he bought 'The Grove' and its landscaped park.

He had employed the architects Henry Travis and William Magnell to design his warehouse in Portland Street, Manchester, now the Britannia Hotel. Later he employed them to remodel the house, which he renamed Abney Hall. A. W. N. Pugin and John Crace were employed for the spectacular interior.

In 1857 Prince Albert stayed here, the first of many famous visitors who included Edward VII, Gladstone and Disraeli.

The grounds were remodelled and there are the remains of a number of ponds and a rock garden with a waterfall.

The walls of the kitchen garden containing heating cavities and a gothic ventilating shaft, perhaps by Pugin, remain, but were unfortunately damaged when an unsuitable office block was built, and a disproportionate new building is now being erected inside the walls. Early photographs also show elaborate glass houses.

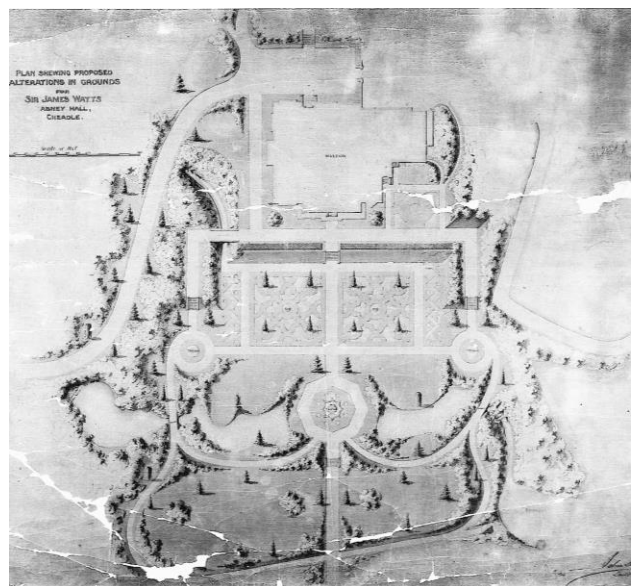
In 1870 Sir James engaged a local landscape gardener John Shaw to redesign the gardens. Shaw was the secretary to the Manchester Botanical & Horticultural Society, and had a nursery at Bowden which *The Gardener's Chronicle* of 1 October 1864 called 'one of the best laid out....and most beautifully situated nurseries'.

Shaw also designed the gardens at Wythenshawe Hall and Stamford Park, Altrincham.

Shaw's plan (*below*) shows a terrace along the front of the house, with steps leading down to a formal parterre with conical conifers.

Beyond was an arrangement of curved paths set around a circular bed, and then a lawn with specimen trees which ended at a brook, shown on the plan as being dammed to form two small lakes.

In 1893 a large addition was made to the house, and the terrace extended, so the steps are no longer central. There is no trace of the proposed terraces wings that were to border the parterre each side, nor is it known if the planned lakes were constructed.



James Watts II was an early photographer who illustrated the *Pilgrimages To Old Homes* series by Fletcher Moss. James Watts III was married to the sister of Agatha Christie, who described Abney in a number of her stories.

In 1959 the estate was sold to Cheadle Council, and became the Town Hall. It is now used as

offices, and much of the estate has been sold, but the remaining land is open to visitors, although the M60 causes noise problems.

The gardens are now grassed over.

Buckley Hall, a detached stone building in the grounds was regretfully demolished in 1963. In 2010 Stockport Council received a Lottery grant to enhance the park.

Perhaps at some future date, the gardens will be recognized as being of equal importance and reinstated.

John Davies

Photo of Abney Hall and reproduction of Shaw's Plan kindly provided by Ann Brooks

Sources

C1/5/3, Watts Archive, Manchester Central Reference Library Archives. Contains Shaw's plans for the garden.

Some Members' Gardens. (Gardens of members of the Manchester Botanical & Horticultural Society). Monograph by Ann Brooks. Published by the Portico Library. 2008.

The Buildings of England: Cheshire. Pevsner, Hubbard, Hartwell & Hyde. Yale University Press. 2011.

Pilgrimages to Old Homes. Fletcher Moss. Didsbury. 1903.

Grove House, Cheadle

The history of Abney Hall would have been very different if it hadn't been for the death, at an appallingly early age, of its previous owner, Alfred Orrell. Born on 10 February, 1815, the son of Ralph and Mary, Alfred was a precocious young man.

With no brothers, just three sisters, Alfred became the owner of the Travis Brook Mill in Heaton Mersey on the death of his father in 1831. He was only 16. Ten years later he was elected as Mayor of Stockport. This didn't find favour with the local newspaper, which thought he was too young, but was the result of political manoeuvrings. The Anti-Corn Law League had been formed in 1838 and all the local authorities in the area wanted to be able to speak with one voice. Orrell was a firm member of the League.

So, one way and another, Orrell was a really well-known local resident. Rich, but also well-liked. In addition to his home in Cheadle – Grove House – he owned The Cottage at Grasmere. Not a cottage as we would imagine it though – it had ten bedrooms, for a start, plus servants' quarters and plenty of outbuildings and it stood in fifteen acres of grounds.

Orrell married in the autumn of 1847 and the following August he and his wife, Mary Louisa, played host to the Unitarian Sunday School fete. Nearly 300 children were carried by wagon to Grove House where they had a great time. Orrell had prepared various amusements and pastimes and seemed to have as much fun as the children, despite showers of rain sending them scurrying indoors from time to time.

The children enjoyed running around the pleasure ground and the gardens, exploring the hothouses, conservatories, rockeries, cascades and the lake with its boat. Meanwhile nearly 500 adults enjoyed the sumptuous feast put on for them.

At last it was time to go home. Orrell thanked them all for coming and looked forward to their return the following year.

Alas, it was not to be. Just five months later Orrell died, leaving a widow and young daughter, named Mary after her mother.

All Orrell's properties were put up for sale and the adverts provide us with some idea of what Grove House gardens were like at that time. The property covered more than 24 acres in total. The pleasure grounds had been laid out by "an eminent landscape gardener" and were "picturesque and beautiful". Chorlton Brook flows through the grounds and this had been used in the design, with the flower garden alongside and two rustic bridges across.

The lake was full of fish and there was a grotto. The walled gardens were well stocked with fruit trees and the practical additions of coach-house and stables, a lodge and a gardener's house completed the picture.

Twenty-one years later, Orrell's daughter was married to James Higginbotham of Glasgow. Mary Louisa apparently then felt free to re-marry and in 1871 she wed Sir Joseph Whitworth, who gave Manchester the Whitworth Art Gallery and Park.

Joy Uings

Congratulations to CGT Member Graham Hardman who travelled to the Japanese embassy in London in December to receive the award of the Order of the Rising Sun, Gold Rays and Rosette for his contribution to introducing and promoting Japanese Gardens in the UK.



Well, the 300th anniversary of Capability Brown's birth in 1716 is finally here. It seems fitting that this month we choose a quote which takes us to Croome Court, the seat of Lord Coventry and Brown's first big commission.

Lord Coventry's relationship with Brown was such that he erected a monument to him at his lakeside.

Find out more at www.capabilitybrown.org/news/site-month-croome.

"His Majesty on Saturday last sent word to Lord Coventry, that he intended his Lordship the honour of a visit on Saturday next. Preparations are accordingly making (*sic*) at Lord Coventry's seat to receive him. It is a very elegant villa, about eight miles from Worcester, and thirty from Cheltenham. The pleasure grounds, which are remarkably beautiful, were laid out by Capability Brown."

Oxford Journal, 26 July 1788

RHS Garden, Bridgewater

I am sure that by now all members will know of the RHS plan to turn the grounds of Worsley New Hall into a fifth RHS Garden to be known as Bridgewater. Worsley Old Hall was the home of the 3rd Earl of Bridgewater of Bridgewater Canal fame and the New Hall was built by Francis Egerton. He was the second son of the Duke of Sutherland and would become Earl of Ellesmere.

Although many related families – like the Egertons at Tatton and the Duke of Sutherland at Trentham – were Caldwell customers, we've not yet come across the Bridgewaters in the ledgers. Nevertheless Don Leaman thinks that Caldwell's may have provided plants in the 1840s and wonders whether some are still there. So perhaps a visit is needed before work begins to see if we can identify trees of the right vintage!

January is the month for planning the gardening year. So here's some dates to put in your diary.

Combermere Abbey Gardens will be open on 24 April for the annual Bluebell Walk and there will be Garden Open afternoons each month from May to September. Full details are available at www.combermereabbey.co.uk/media/2016_Abbey_Tours_and_Events_Booklet.pdf.

Mellor Village, at the very edge of Cheshire, almost in Derbyshire will be holding an Open Gardens day on 22 May. Of the 24 gardens, 7 have never opened to the public before. Money raised will go to Cancer Research UK and Mellor Parish Centre. £9 on the day or £7 if you book in advance. For further details see www.melloropengardens.org.uk.

There is a choice for the first weekend of September. You can either join the CGT visit to see some of Sweden's garden heritage or, if you want to find out some more about the birthday boy, Cambridgeshire Gardens Trust will be hosting this year's Conference with 'Capability' Brown as the subject. Plenty of time to decide though. Why not come along to the Spring Lecture to see what is on offer in Sweden?

Copy date for April newsletter is 31 March

Contributions to the Newsletter are very welcome. If you want to comment on articles in this edition or would like to contribute one for the next, please contact the

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